

Regional Council Activity Report

March 28, 2000



Briefing to Member Agencies from Executive Director James M. Bourey

Executive Director's Report

The month of March has brought many reminders that transportation issues are a high priority for Valley residents. From the passage of a four-tenths of a cent transit tax in Phoenix, to testimony from citizens regarding Superstition freeway issues, it is encouraging and heartening to see that citizens are engaged and involved in discussions affecting our transportation future. And, although opinions may differ on specific issues, there is universal agreement that transportation planning in the years to come must entail far more than pouring pavement, although freeway construction will continue to be an important strategy in moving traffic.

The Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) is committed to “multi-modal” planning, an often misused (and occasionally even overused) label that encompasses everything from bike and pedestrian plans to telework and transit programs. But with the regional freeway system now being accelerated by seven years to 2007, it is imperative for us to stop and think about our regional focus once the freeway system is complete. How will our transportation decisions help this region prosper in the new economy? How will changes in land use, population growth, demographics and technology impact air quality, mobility, and our quality of life?

For MAG, this focus on the future has already begun. On Saturday, March 25, MAG brought together a group of private-sector transportation experts to discuss development of a new MAG Regional Transportation Plan. Participants considered a variety of potential impacts on future transportation planning, such as how the region's continued growth will change transportation needs, how technology is changing our style of work, how the aging population and “echo boomers” (children of baby boomers) will impact travel, and more.

Another significant issue that will affect transportation patterns is land use. Just last week, MAG was notified that it will receive a \$295,000 grant under the Transportation and Community and System Preservation Program. The grant allows MAG to assist with implementing Growing Smarter in the region. Through this project, MAG will encourage a regional framework to facilitate transportation, infrastructure and open space investment decisions, thereby contributing to sustainable communities.

On March 21, MAG held a Regional Trails Forum as part of its development of the Regional Off-Street System (ROSS) Plan. More than 30 citizens attended the forum. The goal of the ROSS plan is to provide a way for people to travel to local destinations by walking or bicycling. These paved pathways and unpaved trails will be located in areas such as canal banks, linear parkways and flood control channels throughout Maricopa County. By helping to shape the pathway plan, citizens are helping to improve air quality and relieve traffic congestion, while at the same time finding a way to enjoy their neighborhoods and communities.

The list goes on. Other MAG programs include developing bike and pedestrian plans, implementing regional videoconferencing systems, funding alternative fuel programs, and advancing human services plans that address often unthought-of transportation issues such as elderly mobility and welfare-to-work challenges.

As the single regional agency responsible for transportation, air quality, regional development and human services planning, MAG is in a unique position to lead the charge in improving the efficiency of our transportation system, reducing the impacts of transportation on the environment, and reducing the need for costly investments in public infrastructure in the future. We look upon this challenge as our responsibility, our duty, and our legacy to the future citizens of this region.



Regional Council Meeting Report for March 22, 2000

Council Approves TIP and Plan

The MAG Regional Council voted unanimously to approve for conformity analysis a five-year transportation plan which includes 1,256 projects totaling \$4.54 billion. The FY 2001-2005 MAG Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) includes more than a billion dollars in transit improvements and contains numerous projects that are part of an accelerated plan to complete the regional freeway system by 2007, seven years earlier than originally planned. The TIP also includes construction of HOV lanes along the Superstition and Squaw Peak freeways and grade separations of eight traffic interchanges along Grand Avenue.

The Council also unanimously approved the MAG Long Range Transportation Plan, a transportation blueprint for the next 20 years. The plans will now

undergo analysis to ensure that the projects conform to air quality standards. Once the conformity analysis is complete, the plans will come back to the Council for final approval in June or July.

For more information, contact Terry Johnson, MAG Transportation Manager, (602) 254-6300.

Retaining Walls a Design Issue, Council Says

As part of its vote on the TIP, the Regional Council approved funding for the realignment of retaining walls along the Superstition Freeway. By a vote of 21-6, the Council decided that the issue of where to place the walls is a design issue that should be determined by the Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT). The City of Tempe has objected to ADOT's plan to move the walls to a location which would accommodate additional traffic lanes or transit improvements in the future. Tempe, which opposes any additional widening, wanted the walls moved only far enough to accommodate a single HOV lane in each direction. ADOT maintained that moving the walls to a location which would allow additional widening could be less costly to taxpayers in the long run, saving the expense of having to relocate the walls a second time should the freeway later be expanded. The MAG Long Range Transportation Plan does not call for any additional widening through Tempe, and if any widening beyond the HOV lanes were to take place, it would need MAG's approval.

For more information, contact James M. Bourey, MAG Executive Director, (602) 254-6300.

Intellisys to Implement Videoconferencing System

The MAG Regional Council approved a recommendation by the MAG Telecommunications Advisory Committee and selected the Intellisys Group to implement the MAG Videoconferencing System. The contract amount will not exceed \$1,100,000. The contract award and first year's network and operating costs together will not exceed \$1,426,000. Intellisys will be providing video and audio equipment necessary to implement the regional videoconferencing system. The goal of the MAG videoconferencing program is to enable members to communicate directly with one another, agency-to-agency, as well as increase participation from under-served populations who may not be able to travel downtown for MAG meetings. In addition, such access is expected to reduce regional vehicle trips, improve air quality, save time, and enhance communications between cities and other regional stakeholders. For more information, contact Rita Walton, MAG Information Services Manager, (602) 254-6300.



Upcoming Issues

Deadline Approaches for EPA Approval of Carbon Monoxide Plan

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has until April 27, 2000 to approve the 1999 MAG Serious Area Carbon Monoxide Plan. The Plan includes 56 committed measures from the state and local governments to help prevent future exceedances. In addition, the Plan points out that there have been no exceedances of the federal standards for carbon monoxide in nearly three years.

For more information, contact Lindy Bauer, MAG Environmental Services Manager, (602) 254-6300.

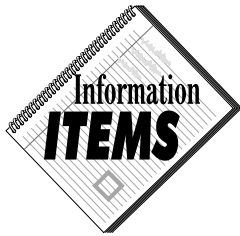
Particulate Sanctions Lifted Soon?

The EPA could lift restrictions for major producers of dust and other particulates by early April, when the agency is expected to approve the 1999 MAG Serious Area Particulate Plan for PM-10. Currently, industries such as power plants and sand-and-gravel operations are prohibited from starting up or expanding unless they can reduce their emissions by two pounds for every pound created.

MAG submitted the strengthened particulate plan on December 23, 1999, after being notified in November that the EPA wasn't satisfied with the 1999 MAG Serious Area Particulate Plan for PM-10 (particulate matter less than 10 microns in diameter). Should the EPA fail to approve the revised plan by September 2, a second set of restrictions — loss of federal highway funds resulting in a conformity lapse — would occur.

Recently, the EPA sent a letter to Maricopa County raising concerns with the County's new draft enforcement policy for dust control rules. It is anticipated that the County will be addressing these issues in order to satisfy EPA's concerns.

For more information, contact Lindy Bauer, MAG Environmental Services Manager, (602) 254-6300.



Information Items

National Expert on Domestic Violence Provides Regional Training

Sarah Buel, a national expert on Domestic Violence, visited the Valley March 22nd to provide training and advice to the MAG Domestic Violence Council. Buel, who has over 20 years experience working with battered women and establishing award-winning programs across the country, discussed the elements of successful regional domestic violence councils.

The MAG Domestic Violence Council represents the largest domestic violence coordination effort in the country. The 50-member council is made up of domestic violence service providers, elected officials, business leaders, victim advocates, medical providers, foundations and members of the faith-based community. Their task is to oversee the implementation of 41 recommendations contained in the MAG Regional Domestic Violence Plan. For more information, contact Carol Kratz, MAG Human Services Manager, (602) 254-6300.



Upcoming Events

Make Your Reservations

MAG is currently accepting registration for a statewide forum on alternative fuels. "Arizona Alternatives: Clean Fuels for Clean Cities" will be held on April 25, 2000 at the Mesa Community and Conference Center.

The forum is designed to promote, celebrate and showcase alternative fuel programs. The first-ever statewide forum will recognize the achievements of stakeholders in supporting and encouraging the use of alternative fuels. The forum will also provide a chance for citizens to learn more about the benefits of driving an alternative fuel vehicle.

The forum will feature discussions aimed at alternative fuel providers, fleet managers, Clean Cities stakeholders and other decision makers. Information booths and displays will help teach the motoring public more about alternative fuels and how they can be used. One display will feature a 'ride and drive' where participants can drive or be driven in a variety of alternative fuel and advanced technology vehicles. The cost is \$95. Registration forms are due by April 7, 2000.

For more information, contact Anne MacCracken, Clean Cities Planner, (602) 254-6300.

Next Regional Council Meeting

The next Regional Council Meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 26, 2000 at 5:00 p.m. at the MAG offices, 302 N. 1st Ave., Suite 200. Agenda items will include the Desert Spaces Implementation Task Force and Environmentally Sensitive Development Standards. The Desert Spaces Task Force was established by the Regional Council in 1996 to develop strategies to implement the regional open space plan. The task force has worked since that time to develop two products: recommendations for implementation of the plan and environmentally sensitive development standards. Additional agenda items are pending.

For more information, contact Dennis Smith, MAG Assistant Director, (602) 254-6300.